



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY

June 6, 2006

Linda McCulloch  
Superintendent of Public Instruction  
Montana Office of Public Instruction  
PO Box 202501  
Helena MT 59620-2501

Dear Superintendent McCulloch:

I am writing to acknowledge that staff members from the U.S. Department of Education (the Department) have been in ongoing communication with officials from the Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI) about the State's failure to adopt a rigorous State assessment of subject knowledge and teaching skills in the basic elementary curriculum for elementary teachers new to the profession. I want to further acknowledge that on June 2, 2006, we received a plan submitted by the Montana OPI to correct that situation.

The OPI has informed us that, effective July 1, 2006, it will put in place a rigorous State test of content knowledge and teaching skills in the elementary school curriculum. In establishing a cut-off score for its test, Montana will utilize a composite score approach that considers, in addition to the teacher candidates' performance on the Praxis II content test, their grade-point average in 30 credit-hours of core content courses and their rating on a performance assessment of teaching skills and content knowledge. In addition, the State may choose to consider elementary school teacher candidates who graduated from a State-approved teacher training program in the spring of 2006, successfully completed their student teaching, and satisfied the composite score requirement or passed either the Praxis or Montana's performance assessment as highly qualified.

It is our understanding that the Montana OPI plans, at some point in the future, to replace this composite approach with a revised, validated version of its performance assessment designed to evaluate content knowledge and teaching skills. The Montana OPI may do so, but only if the revised assessment meets the statutory requirements for the elementary school teacher test.

Because the composite test requirement may not be fully implemented before the FY 2006 ESEA grants are awarded on July 1, 2006, the Department will place a condition on Montana's ESEA Title I, Part A and Title II, Part A grants. The conditions will remain in force until such time as the Montana OPI has fully implemented the composite score approach as described in its June 2, 2006, correspondence. If the State fully complies with this requirement, we do not anticipate imposing any additional sanctions or penalties on the Montana OPI regarding this issue.

In addition, the incomplete data that the State has submitted to the Department indicates that your State is unlikely to meet the 100 percent HQT goal by the end of the current school year. The Department looks forward to reviewing the revised plan you will submit in July that details the specific steps you will take to reach the HQT goal in the 2006-07 school year and beyond.

Sincerely,

/s/

Henry L. Johnson

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